

Historically, the Confederate flag is a symbol of the Democratic Party. Today, however, Republicans can fly and wave it, but Democrats can't talk about it - or don't know how to.

The *symbol* presidential candidate Howard Dean used got in the way of his *substance*, but his substance was on point - and the point was southern whites and blacks together must focus on their common economic needs: jobs, good schools, affordable health care.

Howard Dean has a *new* Democratic southern strategy.

Democrats know the divide in the South is race. Republicans have exploited it. Democrats have evaded it.

Every Democrat has known since the civil rights movement that the party was becoming less competitive in the South because of race. Republicans have successfully exploited race (in proportion to black voting strength) since Richard Nixon's "southern strategy" of 1968, by, among other things, using racial code words: Nixon's "law and order," Reagan's "states' rights" and "welfare queen," and the first George Bush's "Willie Horton."

When white moderates started catching on to their racial tactics, Republicans switched from racial to mainly social issues, as a *diversion* to misdirect voters away from the

economic plight of many southerners, white and black.

For example, Republicans campaign to "keep prayer in public schools," "to display the Ten Commandments in public buildings," to maintain "under God" in the pledge of allegiance, and around the death penalty, welfare mothers, abortion, homosexuality and pornography - all of which play well in the *socially* conservative Bible belt of the South. As a result, Republicans market *cultural* campaigns around *moral* values.

It's one thing for the South to be conservative socially in the Bible belt, but quite another to be economically conservative. But Republicans deliberately blur the distinction between *social* and *economic* conservatism.

Economically, when compared to other U.S. regions, the South has disproportionately high unemployment, unfair taxes, poverty, illiteracy, poor schools, and inadequate health care and housing - for both white and black. Why would anyone want to conserve such economic misery?

So what have Republicans offered these working-class white southerners? *Tax cuts for the rich*, less government, a strong military message, plus symbolic cultural, social and moral issues.

Disappointingly, Democrats over several decades, rather than campaigning around common economic needs of southern whites and blacks, have mostly imitated Republicans on social and cultural issues, and failed to challenge around economic issues. White Democrats,

South and North, want and need the black vote to win, but then avoid meeting black economic and political expectations that accompany their vote.

In lieu of offering an economic agenda to southern voters, Democrats instead have used the idea of a "regionally balanced ticket" as the way of dealing with this problem.

John F. Kennedy put Lyndon Johnson on the ticket in 1960. LBJ went with Hubert Humphrey in 1964. Jimmy Carter's running mate in 1976 was Walter Mondale. In 1988, Michael Dukakis ran with Lloyd Bentsen. And as the southern white Democratic vote continued to decline, Bill Clinton used a two-pronged strategy in 1992-96, appealing to social conservatism *and* putting a second southerner on the ticket. They campaigned in support of the death penalty, ending welfare as we know it, and

putting an end to the era of big government. Most recently, in 2000, conservative northern Democrat Joseph Lieberman ran alongside southerner Al Gore.

Rather than repeating this stereotypical and condescending approach of appealing to whites in the South with a "balanced ticket" and "social conservatism," Howard Dean dares a new approach - to join whites and blacks around a common economic agenda of good schools and health care.

If Howard Dean wins the nomination around an economic agenda, and can *effectively* combat the certain Republican tactic of diversion - using social issues openly, and race more subtly, to sublimate economic concerns - then Democrats may once again be able to win in the South and pursue a progressive economic agenda for the benefit of *all*

Americans.

That's Howard Dean's approach and his challenge. I support him because I think it's the right strategy politically, economically and morally.